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Religious systems and the secular-religious cleavage: Turkey and Western Europe compared

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Abstract

The Christian Democratic movement of Western Europe is a good example of how a radical, illiberal, and undemocratic force can be integrated into the democratic political system. Up to now, it has been one of the few examples of religious movements' moderation. The recent period in Turkey has shown that the Islamic movement can also be compatible with democratic politics. The paper aims to find reasons and incentives for the transformation of the Islamic movement in Turkey.

Paper considers organizational structures of Christian and Islamic religions, as well as the secularization processes that were implemented in both the Turkish and Christian Western European cases, that made an impact on the transformation process of the religious movements. We can conclude that Western Europe and Turkey have witnessed different types of secularization processes (the former implemented polity separation, in the cases of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, while the latter focused on the polity dominance model). Structural differences in religious systems, which are completely different for Western Europe and for Turkey, played a decisive role in choosing an appropriate model. The former represents the church type, and the latter, organic religion. The only similarity we have witnessed between Turkey and Western Europe (here I mean Roman Catholic Western Europe) is the nature of the church-state cleavage. The nature of the church-state cleavage in Catholic Western Europe is more antagonistic than in protestant North-Western Europe. The former type of split was more similar to Turkey's. Conclusions of this paper were basically drawn on the basis of the field research in Istanbul: observations of the Islamic parties of Turkey, organizations connected to Islamic movement, and in-depth interviews with their representatives and supporters.

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1. Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the Secular-religious cleavage it is necessary to understand the nature of the relationship between religion (in our case Islam-Catholicism) and politics. According to Donald Smith's theoretical framework, the structural differences in religious systems can be distinguished in the differences between "church religions" and "organic religions." Smith defines a church religion as one in which there is a well-established church that has a separate identity from the rest of the society. Organic religions, on the other hand, according to Smith include those religions that do not have a well-established church and which have been merged into the social system. As Smith describes "[organic religions] ... tend to define their collective expression in terms of the structure of an entire society. Sacral law and sacral structure are of the essence of organic religions. Religion is largely equated with society, and distinct ecclesiastical organizations, to the extent that they exist, are secondary" (Smith, 1970).

As mentioned, the nature of the relationship between religion and politics has a direct impact on how the secularization process is determined. In order to assess the overall process of secularization in terms of its impact on political processes it is useful to use Smith's second theoretical framework. According to this, there are four types of secularization processes: a) polity separation; b) polity expansion; c) polity trans-valuation, and 4) polity dominance. "Polity separation" refers to cases in which the functions of the church and the state are clearly drawn, and the church is given only spiritual domain. "Polity expansion" refers to cases in which the scope of the secular state is broader and the state performs various socio-economic functions, such as in the field of law and education, at the expense of religious institutions. "Polity trans-valuation" refers to cases in which religious values are replaced by secular ones. "Polity dominance" represents the antipode of polity separation and refers to the types of secularization processes in which the secular state dominates the religious sphere (Smith, 1970).

2. Empirical Cases of Islam (Turkey), Catholicism and Protestantism of Western Europe

As we see, the relationship between the church¹ and the political sphere as well as secularization processes can be categorized into different types. By using Smith's theoretical framework, I will consider the empirical political secularization processes of three different religions: Sunni Islam (the Turkish case), Catholicism, and Protestantism. I will focus on the main political aspects of the secularization processes that effect subsequent political processes: the formation of anti-secular movements, religious parties and their transformation. In order to answer all these questions it is necessary to describe and assess the relationship between religion and politics along with the secularization process of each religion from a historical viewpoint.

Islam has a weak structural organization without any real autonomous religious organization and without a priest class that would mediate between man and God. Borders between the religious and social systems are blurred, so according to Smith's framework, Islam belongs to the organic religions (Smith, 1970). We cannot say the same in the case of the Christian church² which, unlike Islam, is well-established and has a separate identity from the other social institutions. Consequently, Christianity falls into the category of Smith's church religions (Fig. 1).

Because of the Islamic Umma's ("umma" means "community of believers") "dual character" (the umma simultaneously carries out the functions of both the religious community and political society) Lewis asserts that in case of Islam (unlike Christianity) there is no theoretical distinction between God and Caesar's domains (Lewis, 1987). It is a well-known fact, that when Jesus was asked about the payment of taxes to one's government He answered "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." He says that His kingdom is not of this world. Jesus Christ had not come to destroy the civil laws, and He recognized the existence of secular governments (Hyma, 1938). Christianity allowed an allegiance to two powers – the civil and the ecclesiastical, and the church was not necessarily above the state. The two, state and church powers were independent of each other. The former had rights

¹ As Turkish scholars, among them Binnaz Toprak, assert the church concept does not exist in Islam. Thus, like Binnaz Toprak, I use the term church in case of Islam in a heuristic, technical sense. See, Binnaz Toprak, "Politisation of Islam in a Secular State: The National Salvation Party in Turkey," Ed., Said Amir Arjomand, *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1984, p. 133.

² In Christian Church I mean both Catholic and Protestant Churches.

in the temporal sphere, the latter in the spiritual field (Hyma, 1938). On the basis of this we can argue that, in general, Islam is more removed than Christianity from the borders of belief and therefore has a stronger influence on the political doctrine of the society of which it is a part. Siegman describes this phenomenon perfectly when he mentions that, because of the Islamic religion's decisive role in the organization of all social institutions, it leaves little room for the state to operate when the major function and purpose of those institutions is the defense of Islam rather than the state. In other words, in Islamic societies, every aspect of societal or state functions have taken their roots from Islam, therefore every institution is responsible to Islam as well (Siegman, 1964).

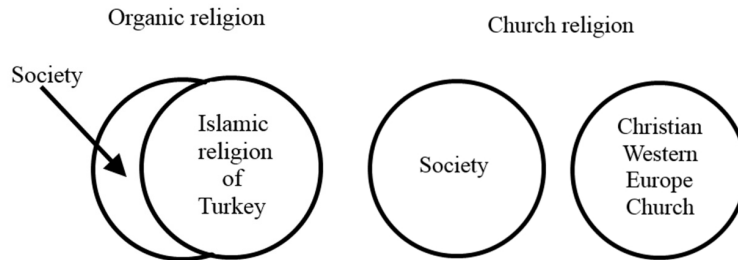


Fig. 1. Structural differences in religious systems of Christian Western Europe and Islamic Turkey

As Toprak argues, the history of the secularization movement in both Ottoman and Republican Turkey is an example of an attempt to limit Islam's influence on socio-political processes, or to put it in other words, it can be seen as an attempt to transform Islam's original dual nature (secular and religious) and to make distinctions between the secular and the religious (Toprak, 1981). The head of the Ottoman Empire (Sultan-Caliph) combined these dual functions – he was, at the same time, a temporal ruler and the spiritual leader of the most powerful Islamic empire. So, the power structure of the Ottoman Empire symbolized the unity of religion and state (Berkes, 1964). In contrast, Catholic Western Europe separated the spiritual and temporal fields and the system there was divided into the jurisdiction of two leaders: the Monarch and the Pope.

Here, it is worth noting Mardin's hypothesis that Islam played an intermediary role between the individual and the state in the Ottoman Empire (Mardin, 2008). I think that we can argue that the Christian Church also played the role of intermediary but, unlike Islam, it played an intermediary role between the individual and God. So, in the case of the Christian Church the state was excluded from this intermediary process. Islam penetrated further into socio-political relations than the Christian Church. Mardin further argues that, unlike Western Europe where there was a network of autonomous secondary structures, in the Ottoman Empire there were no such structures (Mardin, 2011). Islam filled this gap by becoming the only source of collective identity and the sole defender of societal interests. Thus, Islam in the Ottoman Empire took on and provided the functions of what were secondary structures in Western Europe (Mardin, 2008).

Islam, unlike the Catholic and Protestant Churches, has no institutes of priesthood or clergy. However, the *ulema*,³ with its considerable wealth and power – like the clergy of Western Europe – represented a part of the state bureaucracy and played a powerful role in performing administrative functions in the Ottoman Empire. Under the power of the *ulema* were the judicial and educational sectors (things such as curriculum and the organization of education), the interpretation of Islamic law and the staffing and administration of the court system, as well as the oversight of political decisions (the *ulema* was the only organization with such a function) (Toprak, 1981). Since its establishment, the Christian Church acquired many advantages and privileges and gained enormous wealth (even

³ *Ulama*, also spelled *ulema*, Arabic 'ulamā', the learned of Islam, those who possess the quality of 'ilm, "learning," in its widest sense. From the 'ulamā', who are versed theoretically and practically in the Muslim sciences, come the religious teachers of the Islamic community—theologians (*mutakallimun*), canon lawyers (*muftis*), judges (*qadis*), professors—and high state religious officials like the *shaikh al-Islām*. In a narrower sense, 'ulamā' may refer to a council of learned men holding government appointments in a Muslim state.

more than the Islamic *umma*) as well as exemption from ordinary taxation. For example, their landed possessions comprised 3-10 % (by various estimations) of the entire landmass of France (McManners, 1969). But, despite this wealth, the Church's power was not as broad as in the case of Islam. Unlike the *umma*, the Church neither represented state bureaucracy, nor played a powerful role in performing state administrative functions. Moreover, the Church had no power of administration with regard to the court system and did not oversee political decisions.

The need for reform in the Ottoman Empire was first recognized in the seventeenth century. However, the second half of the nineteenth century can be seen as the point when the secularization processes and the Westernization of the military, educational, legal, and political institutions became a major concern for the rulers of the Ottoman Empire. There was, of course, disagreement among reformers and Ottoman intellectuals. One faction, called "Westerners", supported the wholesale adoption of Western civilization (that is both Western technology and culture), while the Islamist opposition supported the adoption of Western technology, but opposed taking on the trappings of Western culture. Both sides agreed that the adoption of Western technology was the key for the development and restoration of the Ottoman Empire's former glory (Heper, 1993). The "Westerners" saw the need for Western technology and institutional forms, but they could not conceive of a way to achieve this goal without also adopting western culture. (In the following chapter we will see how one of the major Islamist parties – The Welfare Party – solved the problem of accepting western technology without changing the Islamic culture) (Toprak, 1981).

Ottoman reformers adopted western culture and did not try to destroy the traditional Islamic culture that had created the dual institution system. Because of Islam's dual character – its involvement in both secular and political affairs – and its antipathy towards Westernization, it was very hard for reformers to implement Westernization⁴ processes by using the very social and political system in which religion itself had the power to veto any real change. In my opinion, in Western Europe the church played a somewhat lesser role when compared with Islam, in terms of sanctioning change. Consequently, in Christian Europe the secular establishment had much less difficulty and a freer hand in implementing any secular reforms. By anticipating the difficulties associated with implementing Western-style reform in the Ottoman Empire, reformers there decided not to endanger religion explicitly and instead to leave it intact (Toprak, 1981).

This controversy was resolved after the creation of the Turkish Republic. Unlike Ottoman reformers who decided not to be involved in explicit conflict with their powerful religious institution and, instead, maintained the status quo by creating secular institutions without establishing secularized political, legal, and social systems, Kemalists decided to challenge this status quo and took on the Islamic institution which had long been in place in their society. Kemalists did not even try to find ways to integrate Islamic Institutions with Western ones. Instead, they decided to destroy them. It is worth mentioning that the situation in Kemalist Turkey differed from the one in the Ottoman Empire. The creation of the Turkish Republic was carried out as the nation was faced with the danger of conquest from European states. Atatürk played crucial role in defending the Turkish people from external aggressors. Thus, the successful war of independence against the European states gave Atatürk so much legitimacy that he even had the power to go against the religious structure. I think this explains why Kemalists managed to implement such far-reaching secularization reform, in a way that the Ottoman reformers had been unable to achieve. The Kemalists explicitly accepted the general model of Western Civilization, and chose a system modeled explicitly on the French state. However, their path of secularization was somewhat different from the secularization programs that had been carried out in both the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe, including Catholic France. Taking into account Islam's religious and political nature, instead of separating it from politics they decided to constrain it by putting Islam under political control (Toprak, 1981).

The explicit state-religion cleavage got its roots from establishing the Turkish Republic. Atatürk tried to implement a secularization program that included four phases: "(1) *Symbolic secularization*, i.e., enforced changes in aspects of national culture or social life which had a symbolic identification with Islam. (2) *Institutional secularization*, i.e., changes in organizational arrangements designed to destroy the institutional strength of Islam.

⁴ Because in the Ottoman Empire Westernisation was identified with Secularisation I am using these two terms interchangeably.

- (3) *Functional secularization*, i.e., changes in the functional specificity of religious and governmental institutions.
 (4) *Legal secularization*, i.e., changes in the legal structure of society” (Toprak, 1981).

A broad assessment shows a similar secularization program implemented in Christian Western Europe. However, it is worth mentioning that there were some differences within Western European secularization processes (McLeod, 2000). For example, Catholic France offered a systemic secularization model. At the same time Protestant England offered unplanned and unsystematic institutional secularization that, instead of aiming at secularization itself, intended mainly to implement religious equality. Somewhat similar to England, but less explicit and a weaker model of secularization was characteristic for Protestant Germany, where close ties existed between the church and the state with the Church's holding a privileged and powerful public role until 1918 (McLeod, 2000). I think among Western European states, France's model of systemic secularization was most similar to the Turkish case. However, By comparing the types of secularization strategy implemented by the secular state in Turkey and in Catholic Western Europe, we can argue that the former represents a different case. Instead of separation of religion and state which was the case in Western Europe, in Turkey, religious organizations were included in the state and subordinated to the political authority (Özek, 1964). Maybe due to the specific nature of Islam in which, as Özek mentions, politics has theological significance, this kind of secularism (state supervision of religious organizations) is the only possible choice compared to the complete separation of church and state adopted in Western Europe, and reformers simply had no choice. As Toprak states, “If we accept that the principle of the separation of church and state by definition excludes state interference in religious life, we have to agree with Daver that the Turkish Republic is a semi-secular state” (Toprak, 1981).

To summarize, due to its weak and no autonomous structural organization, the Turkish version of Islam represents a good example of organic religion. Taking into account that instead of trying to separate religious and political affairs, reformers in the Ottoman Empire created secular institutions without abolishing existing religious ones (Tunaya, 2010), the secularization process in the Ottoman Empire, as Toprak argues, certainly belongs to the polity expansion type. We cannot say the same about the Republican period in which a different type of secularization process was implemented. Unlike reformers of the Ottoman Empire, Kemalists tried to resolve the issue of the religion-state relationship left open by Ottoman reformers by implementing a secularization strategy of religious sphere dominance - different from both Ottoman Empire and Christian Western European cases. It is important to mention that the choice Kemalist reformers made was determined by the very nature of the organic religion type of Islamic religion-politics relationship. In other words, the very nature of organic religion is its virtual merger with the social system, making it impossible to separate the two. Or as Toprak puts it, “[In the Islamic state] . . . the two [religion and state] cannot be separated but . . . one must be subservient to the other. Hence, what has happened [in the Turkish Republic] is polity dominance rather than polity separation” (Toprak, 1981). Polity separation was the case in Christian Western Europe, where the very nature of the Christianity is “church religion” and the Christianity-politics relationship gave them carte blanche for its implementation. However, it is worth noting that the separation process of religion and state, that is secularization, differed in different confessions and was not equally vulnerable to Catholic and Protestant churches. As McLeod mentions, “in Germany and England Catholics were much more resistant than their Protestant neighbors to the secularizing trends.” Anti-clericalism was central to the Catholic form of secularization; that was not the case in Protestant Church (McLeod, 2000). The Catholic Church used a high-risk strategy, building a network of strongly Catholic institutions and organizations, where the central role was played by priests and nuns (Boutry, 1986). They maintained dogmatic orthodoxy and moral conformity “... often reinforced by explicit threats of hell, as well as by exclusion from the sacraments, and by naming and shaming from the pulpit.” Anti-clericals had very negative attitudes toward Catholic priests, referring to them as crows, spiders, snakes, pigs, and phylloxera. Unlike Catholics in France, for example, secular liberals had positive attitudes toward Protestants. On the other hand, Protestants saw in secular liberalism continuity of modernist forms of Protestantism. As McLeod further states, “This step-by-step conversion to some kind of humanism as, in effect, the highest form of Protestantism, was one of the characteristically Protestant forms of secularization.” McLeod listed several examples of this including the evolution of the German Free Parishes in the 1850s and 1860s, and British Labour Churches, whose members left their chapels in protest for supporting of their ministers for the Liberal Party. Moreover, examples can be drawn from French liberal Protestantism which played an important role in Republican politics (McLeod, 2000). As McLeod argues, Protestants favoured the Republic.

However, they had a hostile attitude toward all forms of “dogma” and the religious hierarchy that characterized the Catholic Church, and consequently questioned all orthodoxy; this sometimes lead to atheism or personal theology, which was not at all similar to traditional orthodoxy. McLeod further argues that the Protestant Church, by its antagonistic position was directly undermining Christianity. Catholicism, on the other hand, by its rigid position on dogmatism and clericalism that provoked a bitter reaction from the secularists, indirectly had the same result (McLeod, 2000).

It is worth mentioning that Protestant Northwest Europe Britain and countries of Scandinavia because of settlement of the sixteen century witnessed cleavage structure of secularization process that was very different from Catholic Europe. As Rokkan argues, “The established Churches [here he means the Protestant Church of Northwest Europe] did not stand in opposition to the nation-builders in the way the Roman Catholic Church did on the continent . . . [where] . . . The broad ‘left’ coalitions against the established powers recruited decisive support among orthodox Protestants in a variety of sectarian movements outside and inside the national churches.” This was not the case in Catholic Southern and Central Europe, where the state-church cleavage had a more hostile character (Flora, 1999).

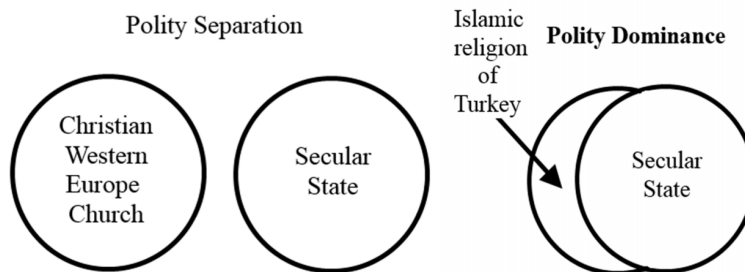


Fig. 2. Secularization types of Christian Western Europe and Islamic Turkey.

As scholars of political Islam argue, the reason behind implementing secularization reform in the Ottoman Empire was the Ottoman Empire’s desire to respond to the West’s increasing military and economic power. Unlike Western secularization that has emerged as a response to internal economic, social and cultural changes, secularization reform in the Ottoman Empire emerged as the reaction to external changes (Black, 1966. Dunn, 1972). If the Ottoman Empire had not had the need to improve their military and economic positions, they would not have abandoned the traditional value system of society (Dunn, 1972). This means that in their case they probably would not have implemented secularization reform. The Western world, because of its non-Muslim character, was regarded as an “infidel world,” which the Ottomans had scorned until the 18th century (Berkes, 1964; Tunaya 2010). Toprak explains that “modernization in the Turkish context has always been synonymous with Westernization... [which] at the mass level has been little understood” (Toprak, 1981). However, what was not mentioned (and in my opinion is worth paying special attention to) is one of the most important additional characters of the secularization process of Islam that distinguishes it from Western European secularization, and one that has implications on the nature and overall strategy of the secularization reform process itself. The secularization process in the Ottoman Empire and in the Turkish Republic’s cases, unlike of Christian Western European, was identified with westernization, which in itself is modernization. Not speaking of just secularization, westernization – that is the adoption of western culture – was causing antipathy and doubt in the Turkish people who were alien to western culture. This very case conditioned the implementation of the secularist program more difficult compared to the Western one and thus required more deliberate and intensive efforts towards its successful implementation. I think one of the most important reasons why the secularization process was polity dominance oriented, and at the same time harsher in Turkey’s case when compared Western European, lies in this very factor.

On the basis of the above-mentioned, we can conclude that Western Europe⁵ and Turkey have witnessed different types of secularization processes (the former implemented polity separation, in the cases of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, while the latter focused on the polity dominance model⁶) (Fig. 2).

3. Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis of the structural aspects of religious systems of Christianity and Islam, we can conclude that the former, with its stronger and hierarchical organization, belongs to church type religions, while the latter, due to its looser, decentralized nature, represents an organic religion. In other words, the nature of organic religion is that it is virtually merged into the social system making it impossible to separate it from the system. These differences in religious systems conditioned the type of secularization that the secular state establishment chose. The very nature of organic religion left no room for the secular state to implement the other type of secularization, rather than polity dominance. Because of the very nature of Islam, their existence as equal entities was impossible and either the state or Islam had to play a dominant role. Accordingly, most of Christian Western European states adopted the polity separation type of secularization, while Islamic Turkey went the way of polity dominance. The only similarity we have witnessed between Turkey and Western Europe (here I mean Roman Catholic Western Europe) is the nature of the church-state cleavage. The nature of the church-state cleavage in Catholic Western Europe is more antagonistic than in protestant North-Western Europe. The former type of split was more similar to Turkey's.

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⁵ Here, I mean both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.

⁶ More or less the same polity dominance model was implemented in Protestant Europe.